



**Statement to the Press by James Cason,  
Chief of Mission U.S. Interests Section  
Havana, Cuba December 14, 2004**

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Cuba is one of the most egregious and consistent violators of human rights in the world.

The United Nations has determined on repeated occasions that human rights abuses in Cuba are an issue of international concern.

The Castro regime maintains that any mention of its flagrant violations of human rights amounts to interference in its internal affairs.

In Cuba, as anywhere in the world, when the United States insists that nations live up to their human rights obligations, that is not interference in internal affairs. We insist that Cuba respect its international commitments, such as the UN Declaration on Human Rights, to which Cuba is a party. The Cuban people have fundamental freedoms, which are being violated on a daily basis by the Castro regime.

Let's look at what is annoying the regime now. Over the past week, the U.S. Interests Section held a Christmas party for the children of political prisoners and a solemn ceremony during which democracy activists deposited messages to be presented on the eve of Cuba's next democratic elections. So threatened was the regime by the children's party that it deployed State Security personnel outside my house to intimidate kids invited to attend.

As part of our holiday celebrations, we also displayed a "75" symbol as a reminder of those arrested for thinking and speaking independently.

The Castro regime is now threatening this diplomatic mission with retaliation. It is doing so because of our unswerving support for Cuba's struggling, valiant civil society, and the peaceful, democratic opposition.

Some insist that dialogue with the dictator is essential. Such "dialogue" can only be on the dictator's terms. He will not tolerate any reminders of this country's brutal human rights abuses. Those who think that dialogue with Castro will produce meaningful human rights improvements need only look at Castro's cynical trading in political prisoners during the past 45 years.

Any action taken against this mission or its personnel will not affect the U.S. Government's determination to defend universally held democratic values and fundamental human rights in Cuba and around the world.

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